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LES FRANCOFOLIES

Cowboys lasso downtown

MASSIVE FREE SHOW

A youthful buzz defined the outdoor love-in

T'CHA DUNLEVY
GAZETTE NEW MUSIC CRITIC

By 8 p.m., people were spilling out on to de Maisonneuve Blvd. By 8:45, they closed Bleury St. Les Cowboys Fringants took over les FrancoFolies last night and, in an apt salute to the festival's spirit, the event turned into one giant love-in.

A youthful buzz was in the air. Of the thousands of fans who came out (organizers didn't release official numbers, but there were clearly far more than the anticipated 20,000), the vast majority were in their teens and 20s. There were many Quebec flags, and even more of the band's green T-shirts.

Les Cowboys Fringants are nothing short of a phenomenon. They are a band of the people, singing songs about real life with tenderness, romance, wit and endless references to the subtleties of Quebec culture.

Their independently released album Break syndical has sold an impressive 85,000 copies. Not bad for a music that owes as much to rootsy Quebec folk as to modern rock. They bring it all together – the music, the politics, the little things – and make it mean something.

Their T-shirts bear the socio-critical phrase "Si c'est ça l'Québec moderne, ben j'mets mon drapeau en berne." (If this is modern Quebec, I put my flag at half-mast.) Far from disowning their culture, Les Cowboys reclaim and redefine it.

"Y-a-tu des Québécois de souche ici ce soir?" (Are there any real Québécois here tonight?) asked singer Karl Tremblay, a few songs in.

The crowd responded with a roar and the party was officially under way. The song was Toune d'automne, an intimate letter to the singer's travelling sister, replete with tender advice and observations on life.

"If you know it, sing along," Tremblay beckoned, en français, bien sûr. And they did – front to back, half of the first verse, before he finally joined them. Several bodies surfed over the crowd, despite the song's languorous pace.

Multi-instrumentalist Marie-Annick Lépine proved the group's secret weapon. Her contributions on violin, accordion and mandolin gave every song a down-home, jamboree-type flair.

Strangely, the concert took place on the smaller Zone Hip Bleue Dry stage and not the main Ford Focus one, which looks out onto Ste. Catherine St. and the grounds of Place des Arts.

Each of the fest's three big free outdoor events is taking place on a different stage to accommodate each of the three main sponsors, according to organizers. Nobody seemed to be complaining, however; it just brought everyone a little closer together.

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MARCOS TOWNSEND THE GAZETTE
Karl Tremblay (left) and Jérôme Dupras of Les Cowboys Fringants perform to an outdoor crowd of thousands last night.

TODAY AT THE FESTIVAL

FREE SHOWS

4 and 7 p.m. Chango Family Circus, Le Monde Forain.
4 to 11 p.m. Karaoke, Tente Karaoké Le Lait.
5 p.m. Mathieu Mathieu, Le Monde Pop Le Lait.
6 p.m. Andrée Watters, L'aire Ford Focus.
7 p.m. Bertrand Louis, Le Monde Trad Desjardins/Radio-Canada.
8 p.m. Les Magouilleurs, La Zone Hip Bleue Dry, Parc des Festivals.
8 and 10 p.m. Annie Major-Matte, Le Monde Pop Le Lait.
8 and 10 p.m. Dupain, Le Monde Multiculturel Hydro-Québec, Parc culturel Hydro-Québec.
9 p.m. Tûq, Le Monde Trad Desjardins/Radio-Canada.
9 and 11 p.m. Les Batinses, L'aire Ford Focus.
10 p.m. GrimSkunk, La Zone Hip Bleue Dry, Parc des Festivals.

TICKETED SHOWS

7 p.m. – CANCELLED. Salif Keita, Spectrum.
7:30 p.m. Michel Rivard, with guest Catherine Durand, Cabaret, 2111 St. Laurent Blvd.Cost: $34.50.
8 p.m. Robert Charlebois, Love, with Les Charbonniers de l'Enfer, Claude Leveillée, Eloi and Jonathan Painchaud, Kate and Anna McGarrigle, Les Cowboys Fringants, Stephen Faulkner, Marc Déry, Lulu Hughes and Lynda Lemay, Salle Wilfrid Pelletier, Place des Arts. Cost: $29.50 to $44.50.
10 p.m. Luc De Larochellière, Monument National, 1182 St. Laurent Blvd. Cost:$14.50.
11 p.m. Prohom and Yann Perreau, Spectrum, 318 Ste. Catherine St. W. Cost: $8.50.

FILM

7 p.m. Joséphine; Kacho Komplo; Epopée, National Film Board, 1564 St. Denis St. Cost: $5 to $7.
9 p.m. Harmonium en Californie, National Film Board, 1564 St. Denis St. Cost: $5 to $7.

OUTDOOR STAGES

L'aire Ford Focus, corner Jeanne Mance and Ste. Catherine Sts.
La Zone Hip Bleue Dry, corner Bleury St. and de Maisonneuve Blvd.
Le Monde Pop Le Lait, in front of Complexe Desjardins on Ste. Catherine St.
Le Monde Trad Desjardins/Radio-Canada, on Jeanne Mance St. between de Maisonneuve Blvd. and Ste. Catherine St.
Le Monde Multiculturel Hydro-Québec, on Ste. Catherine St., corner of Clark St.
Le Monde Forain, on the northwest esplanade of Place des Arts.
Tente Karaoké Le Lait, on the northeast esplanade of Place des Arts.

Tickets available at:
Admission, call (514) 790-1245 or visit the Web site www.admission.com
Spectrum, 318 Ste. Catherine St. W. Phone (514) 861-5851.
Place des Arts, (514) 842-2112.
Club Soda, 1225 St. Laurent Blvd. Phone (514) 790-1111.
Monument National, 1182 St. Laurent Blvd. (514) 871-2224.
Metropolis, 59 Ste. Catherine St. E. Phone (514) 844-3500.
Cabaret, 2111 St. Laurent Blvd. (514) 845-2014.

INFORMATION
For more on the festival, call (514) 876-8989 or 1 (888) 444-9114, or visit www.francofolies.com

NOTES

Now playing at FrancoFolies: Corporate sponsors

Local outfit Le Nombre has idiosyncracy in abundance, from the motley image to singer Ludwig Wax's shtick

Visitors to the jazz fest appreciate the manner in which organizers have woven the corporate presence into stage design. For one thing, it still isn't the *General Motors* International Jazz Festival. So it comes as some surprise to find the corporate presence at Les FrancoFolies a little pushy. This perception was doubtless enhanced by the thin crowd on Ste. Catherine St. late Sunday night, but FORD seemed to be everywhere, in big orange lights.

MARK LEPAGE

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On Sunday night, two of the festival's less exotically rhythmic, more homegrown offerings had obstacles to overcome.

At the Ste. Catherine/Jeanne Mance stage, we learned with some amusement that gale-force winds and smoke machines do not mix well. Kébek blues-rock guy Stephen Faulkner looked like he was playing on the lip of a volcano, with smoke whooshing around his pant legs. Even Genesis or Gentle Giant would have had trouble being taken seriously with dry ice whipping by horizontally at cartoon speed, and the Spinal Tapping did nothing for Faulkner's meat-and-poutine set.

In the case of the late Spectrum show, the obstacles were self-imposed by local rockers Le Nombre – I'd say the number was 411. Information, please, on how a band can look like it briefly considered a life as the franco version of the Strokes, only to be hijacked by the Committee for Elvis Sideburns, stuffed into western shirts and Les Pauls, and end up with a Mick Jagger knockoff fronting a punky Buckcherry.

Guitars from Jean-Philippe (Dynamite) Roy and Nicolas (Nicotine) Bednarz were supertight and barbed-wired together with a Gallic idiosyncracy that said "hard rock" but identified as "indie." Singer Ludwig Wax's shtick contained all the over-enthusiasm of the shticky stage name. Still, it will be interesting to watch Dynamite and Nicotine attempt to set fire to the world beyond FrancoFolies.

MARK LEPAGE

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Short-sleeved blue shirt hung over pale bell-bottoms, looking like he stepped off a yacht, Katerine affected a playboy-manqué air at the Spectrum on Friday night. He made the most of a minimal, fey vocal range, leaning on minor keys, singing monotone like bossa-nova master Joao Gilberto. He occasionally broke out into little marionette-like dances while his band gave a careful reading of '80s pop-electronica (slick like Steely Dan but weirder), gliding through the quirky songs of his latest album, 8ème Ciel.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

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Sandrine Collard is a Belgian technobabe whose debut album, Je communique, has ephemeral lyrics colliding gently with retro video-game electronica – an interesting twist for normally bookish French syntax. In small doses this confessional pop-poésie (like Cache-cache dans le noir) and little-girl-blue routine is strangely compelling. In person she's a living doll. But at the Monde Pop Le Lait stage outside Complexe Desjardins on Friday, her intimate techno style – probably best heard between headphones – sounded almost as cheesy as Muzak.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

WORTH WATCHING

Charlebois in good company

Robert Charlebois, Love (8 p.m., Salle Wilfrid Pelletier, Place des Arts). The last time Charlebois played the big PdA hall was with his brassy Maudite Tournée, which he's admitted became a "caricature" of his superstar status. Showman talents aside, he rediscovered his essential humanity with 2001's Doux sauvage (on a new label, La Tribu). Tonight he shares it with other originals like Kate and Anna McGarrigle, Claude Léveillée, Les Cowboys Fringants, Lulu Hughes, Les Charbonniers de l'Enfer and many more. Word from rehearsals has it that Charlebois Love has developed into a world of its own, full of musical surprises. Tickets cost $29.50 to $44.50.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

IN BRIEF

Rossini downsized at Orford Festival

The Orford Festival has downgraded its planned full production of Rossini's La Cenerentola to a semistaged version with piano and harpsichord. The performances, on Aug. 15 and 17, with student singers, were to have featured the professional Ensemble Montréal in the pit. Agnes Grossmann will conduct and Jean Herbiet will direct, as announced. When asked to explain the change, Orford managing director Sophie Galaise said: "Budget. It's always the same thing." For ticket information, call (888) 310-3665.

Actor Trintignant beaten into coma

VILNIUS, LITHUANIA – French actor Marie Trintignant was in a coma yesterday after being severely beaten over the weekend. Police identified her boyfriend, French rock singer Bertrand Cantat, as a suspect in the attack. Trintignant, 41, was brought to the hospital at about 8 a.m. Sunday from the Vilnius Domina Plaza Hotel, where she was staying with her mother and Cantat, said Dr. Robertas Kvascevicius, who was treating her at Vilnius University Hospital. Trintignant had been in a coma for two hours before arriving at the hospital, Kvascevicius said. She had surgery Sunday to ease pressure on her brain caused by cerebral hemorrhaging. "At this point, I cannot promise anything," the doctor said when asked about her prognosis. Cantat was not under arrest, though police planned to question him at the hotel yesterday, police spokesperson Ruta Andriuskaite said.

Troops will see Stones gig on TV

TORONTO – Canadian and U.S. military forces will be able to rock with the Rolling Stones thanks to a broadcast deal signed yesterday. Troops working overseas in places such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Egypt will get to see the 11-hour MuchMoreMusic broadcast of the Toronto SARS-relief concert through the Canadian Forces television network. U.S. soldiers will receive a feed of the two-hour CBC broadcast.

Drummer charged with assault

WANTAGH, N.Y. – Iron Maiden drummer Michael (Nicko) McBrain was arrested and charged with assault after allegedly hitting a parking attendant with his car on Saturday night. The incident occurred backstage at a theatre in Wantagh, where the band was playing during a stop on its Give Me Ed ... 'Til I'm Dead tour. The attendant, who hurt his wrist after falling onto the hood of the car, alleges the drummer intentionally hit him. McBrain was arrested and released prior to the concert. He was charged with third-degree assault and is to appear in court Sept. 16. Iron Maiden is scheduled to continue its tour today in Columbia, Md. The band performs at the Bell Centre Saturday.

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